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ABSTRACT

While opponents of school choice contend that choice will lead to the demise of public education, the weakening of civil society, and the fostering of separate and unequal systems of education, this book argues that these long-held assertions must give way to present realities. The United States' rich and diverse experience with magnet schools, controlled choice, interdistrict choice, charter schools, privately funded vouchers, and public vouchers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Cleveland, Ohio, provides a solid basis for crafting a choice policy that enhances the educational opportunities of children whose needs are not being met by the present system of public education. The book begins with the promise articulated in the landmark "Brown v. Board of Education" decision of 1954. After reviewing a variety of policy initiatives enacted to promote educational opportunity, the book finds that the nation has fallen short of providing decent schooling for its most disadvantaged children, and in so doing has delayed the movement toward social and political equality. Acknowledging the serious legal and civic concerns registered by choice opponents, the book proposes that providing poor people with public support to attend religious schools is consistent with both the pluralist constitutional model envisioned by James Madison and the practices common to contemporary democratic societies. The book concludes that choice merits support from all sides of the political spectrum because a sound education is an essential foundation for any policy strategy designed to promote a healthy democratic society. Contains extensive notes. (BT)



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